WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1	1.	A method for marking and tracking a multiplicity of hospital instruments
2		comprising:
3		a. marking at least 2 hospital instruments with an optically
4		scannable mark indicative of each instrument's manufacturer or
5		service provider and indicative of a serial number unique to each
6		instrument;
7		b. reading each mark and entering serial number and manufacturer
8		information represented by each mark into a computer database;
9		c. using one or more of the instruments to perform one or more
10		hospital procedures; and
11		d. entering information into the database that identifies each
12		hospital procedure in which each instrument has been used.
1	2.	The method of claim 1, wherein said marking is performed with a laser,
2		an ink jet, or an acid etch.
1	3.	The method of claim 1, wherein said reading and entering comprises
2		scanning with an optical scanner electrically coupled to the database.
•	4	The method of claim 2, wherein the entired coanner is portable
1	4.	The method of claim 3, wherein the optical scanner is portable.
1	5.	The method of claim 1, wherein each of the scannable marks further
2	J.	comprises information indicative of the part number of each instrument.
4		comprised information maleute of the part named of each mentalment.



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- 1 6. The method of claim 5, further comprising inputting a maintenance schedule for each instrument into the database.
- The method of claim 6, further comprising retrieving maintenance schedule information from the database, and performing maintenance on each of said instruments according to the maintenance schedule entered into the database.
- The method of claim 7, further comprising entering information into the database identifying the maintenance procedure performed on each instrument.
- The method of claim 1, further comprising entering information into said database specifying the maximum number of permitted uses for each instrument.
 - 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the database is a relational database.
- 1 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the database is accessible at multiple data entry and retrieval locations.
- 1 12. The method of claim 11, wherein the database is accessible in a computer network.
- 1 13. A method for marking, tracking and maintaining a multiplicity of hospital instruments comprising:

3		a. marking at least 2 hospital instruments with an optically
4		scannable mark indicative of each instrument's manufacturer or
5		service provider and part number, and indicative of a serial
6		number unique to each instrument;
7		b. reading each mark and entering part number, serial number and
8		manufacturer information conveyed by each mark into a
9		computer database;
10		c. using one or more of the instruments to perform one or more
11		hospital procedures;
12		d. entering information into the database that identifies the serial
13		number of each instrument and each hospital procedure in which
14		it has been used;
15		e. inputting a maintenance schedule for each instrument into the
16		database;
17		f. retrieving maintenance schedule information from the database;
18		and
19		g. performing maintenance on each of the instruments according to
20		the maintenance schedule entered into the database.
1	14.	The method of claim 13, further comprising entering information into the
2	14.	database identifying the maintenance procedure performed on each
		instrument.
3		mouument.
1	15.	The method of claim 13, wherein said part number is indicative of
2		designated instrument groupings.

1	16.	The method of claim 13, wherein said reading and entering is
2		performed with a portable optical scanner coupled to transfer data to
3		said computer database.
1	17.	A method for marking, tracking and maintaining a multiplicity of hospital
2		instruments and for auditing instrument maintenance comprising:
3		a. marking at least 2 hospital instruments with an optically
4		scannable mark indicative of each instrument's manufacturer and
5		part number, and indicative of a serial number unique to each
6		instrument;
7		b. reading each mark with an optical scanner;
8		c. transmitting part number, serial number and manufacturer
9		information conveyed by each mark from the scanner to a
10		computer database;
11		d. using one or more of the instruments to perform one or more
12		hospital procedures;
13		e. entering information into the database that identifies the serial
14		number of each instrument and each hospital procedure in which
15		it has been used;
16		f. inputting a maintenance schedule for each instrument into the
17		database;
18		g. retrieving maintenance schedule information from the database
19		h. performing maintenance on one or more of the instruments;
20		i. entering information into the database identifying the
21		maintenance procedure performed on each instrument; and
22		j. retrieving maintenance history and schedule information for one



or more instruments and determining whether scheduled

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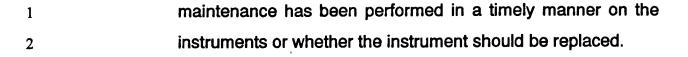
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- 18. The method of claim 17 wherein said determining comprises comparing the maintenance schedule for a particular instrument to the maintenance history for the same instrument.
- 19. The method of claim 17 wherein said database contains information regarding the maximum number of permitted uses for each instrument and said determining comprises comparing the maximum number of permitted uses for a particular instrument to the usage history for the same instrument.
 - 20. The method of claim 17, wherein said retrieving is performed from a data terminal remotely located from the database.